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ABSTRACT

This study describes certain communication strategies used by Anglophone children learning French as a second language as well as by children whose mother tongue is French. Three groups of children in the third and fifth grades participated in the study: French native speakers, Anglophone children learning French in an immersion setting, and Anglophone children in a French school (submersion). Each child listened to a story read to him or her by the examiner. On the second reading, at the end of each paragraph, the child was given three (3) pictures corresponding to that paragraph and was asked to retell the story. The extent to which five syntactic structures were avoided was analyzed. Results indicated that the extent to which avoidance occurred differed according to structure, grade level and group. In addition, common strategies of avoidance, such as paraphrasing, could be identified for all children. (Author/AMH)

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STRATEGIES OF COMMUNICATION USED BY NATIVE AND NON-NATIVE SPEAKERS OF FRENCH

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In this study, we attempt to describe certain communication strategies used by Anglophone children learning French as a second language as well as by children whose mother tongue is French. Specifically, children from three groups at the third and fifth grade levels in Montreal participated in the study. The first group consisted of Anglophone children learning French as a second language in an immersion program; the second group consisted of Anglophone children in submersion--that is, in a French school with other Francophone peers; and the third group consisted of children whose mother tongue was French, who were enrolled in a French school.

Communication strategies refer to the means by which speakers go about communicating an idea verbally. One such strategy is an avoidance strategy. This refers to ways by which language learners avoid the use of some specific structures in the language while still managing to communicate an idea. For example, instead of using the subjunctive il faut que j'aille, one might use the infinitive form il faut aller. Thus, production of specific French structures by second language learners as well as by native speakers was examined for the use of avoidance strategies.

Strategies in Second Language Learning

Much second language literature has focused on the order of production and on the errors made in the production of morphemes. Morpheme acquisition, however, constitutes only a portion of second language production, and in order to make more general inferences about the language learning process, a broader perspective needs to be taken. Several researchers are now taking this approach and are examining the strategies in learning and using a second language. Hence, we find references to learning strategies (Taylor, 1975 a, b; Selinker, Swain & Dumas, 1975), processing strategies (Bailey, Madden & Krashen, 1974) and communication strategies (Tarone, Cohen & Dumas, 1976) in the literature. For purposes of parsimony and consistency, we shall use the term "communication strategy" coined by Tarone et al. (1976) throughout this paper. According to these authors, a communication strategy is a "systematic attempt by the learner to express or decode meaning in the target language, in situations where the appropriate systematic target language rules have not been formed" (p. 78).

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Avoidance is one such strategy and refers to the use of specific "means of getting around target language rules or forms which are not yet an established part of the learner's competence" (Tarone et al., 1976; p. 82). Under this general heading the authors have identified strategies such as topic avoidance, paraphrasing, circumlocution, and language switch. The one avoidance strategy that we focused on in the present research was paraphrase. Tarone et al. defined paraphrasing as "the rewording of the message in an alternate, acceptable, target language construction, in order to avoid a more difficult construction" (p. 83). Spilka (1975), for example, found that learners of French as a second language produce the specified form J'ai trois pommes rather than using the partitive en as in J'en ai trois. She also found that learners avoided the subjunctive form in Il faut que nous partions by saying Il nous faut partir. This categorization of communication strategies was later modified (Tarone, 1977) such that paraphrase constituted a separate category which included circumlocution. Thus, in that classification, paraphrase was not considered as a form of avoidance. Tarone's classification seems to be primarily based on vocabulary and concept use. The present paper, however, deals with the use of grammar structures, and in that context, both paraphrase and circumlocution will be considered as strategies of avoidance.

One question that arises is whether this strategy is unique to second language learning or one that is common to the phenomenon of language acquisition in general. One task in the present research was to describe the various avoidance strategies used by second language learners and to compare them with those of native speakers. Avoidance strategies, which are considered by Tarone et al. to be distinct from transfer and overgeneralization, have generally not been discussed in the second language literature. However, the examination of such strategies might help reveal how the learner's second language system develops.

The methodology used in this study was that of story-retelling. Children listened to a story which they were then asked to retell the way they heard it. This task is similar to the widely known research tool of elicited imitation which has been used by a number of first language acquisition researchers (Ervin, 1964; Menyuk, 1963; Slobin & Welsh, 1973). The task usually consists of giving children sentences to imitate which are longer than their immediate memory span. The rationale (see Slobin & Welsh, 1973) is that a child, presented with a sentence which exceeds his immediate memory span, will restructure the sentence through his own interim grammar before reproducing it. One can draw inferences about the child's transitional rule system on the basis of the deviations of his repetitions from the model sentences.

The elicited imitation technique has been extended to second language learning research with adults as well as children. Naiman (1975) used elicited imitation in a series of experiments to investigate the second language competence of English-speaking children who were participating in a French immersion program. His results suggested that accurate imitation of syntactic structures involves, in addition to decoding the structure, encoding it according to the child's own production system. Two other studies (Hamayan, Markman, Pelletier & Tucker, 1976; Markman, Spilka & Tucker, 1975) also support the conclusion that elicited

imitation is a useful tool for tapping the interim grammar system of a second language learner. Cook (1973) used the technique to compare the use of relative clauses by children learning English as a native language and adults learning English as a second language. He identified similar language processing strategies in the two groups on the basis of their patterns of deviations. Thus, as Swain, Dumas and Naiman (1974) point out, elicited imitation seems to be a useful alternative to more time-consuming and complex techniques of investigating second language learning, such as the collection and analysis of spontaneous speech.

However, it seems that a reasonable alternative to the use of spontaneous speech and of elicitation can be found in story retelling, which combines the advantages of both while minimizing their weakness. The validity of story retelling as a research tool rests on the same assumptions as those for elicited imitation. Again, the child is assumed to process given linguistic material, and reproduce it according to the rule system which governs his language at that time. However, story retelling differs from elicited imitation in that the child is given whole chunks of connected language to process. Since the task stresses the communication of ideas in a given context, the child is led away from a verbatim repetition of the text. Thus, with a story retelling task, one would expect the child's responses to be more analogous to what he would produce spontaneously than is the case in sentence repetition. In addition, story retelling seems to be a much more interesting task for the child than sentence repetition. Finally, since it was possible to insert, within the story, structures of interest to the researcher, one could create the contexts necessary for the production of certain structures, and induce the child to use forms that he might otherwise produce only rarely in spontaneous speech. For the present study, then, avoidance was operationally defined as an instance where the child was encouraged to use a specific structure--due to the context of the story--but instead used another.

METHOD

Subjects. The children in these studies came from three groups at each of two grade levels (three and five): 1) an immersion group (IMM), N = 14 at each grade level; 2) a submersion group (SUB) N= 9 at the grade three level and N = 8 at the grade five level; and 3) a group of French native speakers (FC), N = 14 at each grade level. The first group consisted of English-speaking children learning French as a second language in an immersion program of home-school language switch in a school near Montreal. All the children in this group had begun their immersion program in Kindergarten. The second group consisted of English-speaking children enrolled in a French school along with native speakers of French as well as a few immigrant children of various mother-tongue backgrounds. These children are referred to as the submersion group. Thus, two things differentiated the children in this group from those in IMM. First, the SUB children receive a more intensive French program, since the French school system offers only about 30 minutes a day of ESL instruction, whereas IMM children at third and fifth grades receive approximately 50% of their instruction in English. Second, children in IMM receive their exposure to French native

speakers almost entirely through the teacher, whereas children in the SUB group also have exposure to French through peers at school. The children in the SUB group were chosen from two neighboring schools in Montreal because the number of English-speaking children in any one school is quite small. The third group consisted of native speakers of French attending the same two schools as the SUB children. The children in the three groups came from relatively similar and predominantly middle social class backgrounds. They lived in communities where approximately half of the population was Francophone and half was Anglophone (Statistics Canada, 1974).

Materials. An English children's story, Jerome (Phillips, 1965), was abridged and translated into French by balanced bilinguals. Five structures of interest were built into the story (see Table 1 for examples of each of the structures). These structures were scattered randomly throughout the story. However, in order not to cramp the style and the flow of the story, it was not possible to include an equal number of representations of each structure. Thus, some syntactic structures appeared only twice in the text, and others appeared several times. Nine pictures which illustrated various parts of the story were taken from the original storybook and were used throughout the task. The story was divided into three paragraphs of comparable length, and each paragraph was accompanied by three illustrative pictures.

Table 1

Five Structures of Interest and Examples

Indirect question	Jerome lui demanda ce qu'il faisait avant de devenir sorcier.
Subjunctive	Les gens ont demandé que Jerome accomplisse une action courageuse.
Reflexive	Il s'est enfui.
Auxiliary être	Jerome est allé au sommet de la montagne.
Participle of re verb	Ils lui ont construit un château.

Procedure. Children were tested individually in an empty classroom in their school. The child sat beside the experimenter at a table on which a cassette tape recorder was placed. The experimenter told the child that she was going to read him a story and show him pictures that went with it. The child was told to listen carefully because he would have to retell the story the way he heard it. The experimenter read the story once all the way through and then read each paragraph separately. On the second reading, at the end of each paragraph, the experimenter handed the child the three pictures corresponding to that paragraph and asked him to retell the story the way he had heard

it, with the help of the pictures. Children's responses were recorded for later analysis.

Method of Analysis. Four possibilities of responding emerged:

1) Total absence: the child might skip the whole idea that contained a specific structure when retelling the story.

2) Avoidance: the child might include the idea while retelling the story, but he might avoid the use of the specific structure. In the case of the indirect question, he might state the question directly and avoid the inversion necessary for the indirect form. For example, instead of using the form il lui a demandé ce qu'il faisait, the child would say il lui dit: qu'est ce que tu faisais?

3) Correct use: the child might use the specific structure correctly while mentioning the idea conveyed by that structure.

4) Incorrect use: the child might use the specific structure in a form that deviates from adult native speakers' use of that structure. For example, he would say il lui a demandé qu'est ce qu'il faisait.

The five structures were analyzed for avoidance by noting the proportion of times a child avoided the use of each structure over the total number of times he used that structure. Arcsin transformations were done on the proportions and a three-way analysis of variance was performed on the extent to which each of the five structures were avoided by children from the three groups and in the two grade levels. In addition, the various strategies that were used to avoid the target structures were noted.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Avoidance of Structures. The analysis of variance on the extent to which the five structures (indirect question, auxiliary être, reflexive, participle of re verbs, and subjunctive) were avoided indicated a significant main effect for structures ($F = 7.73$; 4, 280 df; $p < .001$). A Newman-Keuls test indicated that the subjunctive and the participle ($M = .64$ and .52 respectively) were avoided significantly more often than the indirect question, auxiliary, and reflexive ($M = .40, .30, .29$ respectively).

In addition, two interactions were found to be significant. First, a significant interaction between structures and grade level ($F = 8.06$; 4, 280 df; $p < .001$) indicated that structures were avoided differentially by students in the two grade levels. A test of simple effects for each of the grade levels indicated that there was a significant difference between the five structures at both grade levels (grade three: $F = 8.77$; 4, 280 df; $p < .001$; grade five: $F = 10.24$; 4, 280 df; $p < .001$). Newman-Keuls tests at each grade level indicated different groupings of structures at each level (see Table 2). At grade three, the indirect question was avoided more often than the other four structures

which did not differ among themselves. At grade five, not only was the order of structures different, but the results of the Newman-Keuls test indicated that the subjunctive was avoided significantly more often than the participle re, and that they were both avoided more often than the remaining three structures which did not differ from each other.

Table 2

Average Proportion of Avoidance of Five Structures by the Two Grade Levels

	Ind.Ques.	Subjunct.	Auxil.	Particip.	Reflexive
G 3	.60	.46	.45	.40	.30
	Subjunct.	Particip.	Reflex.	Ind.Ques.	Auxil.
G 5	.83	.61	.25	.24	.17

Underlined means are not different from each other, as indicated in the Newman-Keuls analysis.

The second significant interaction in this analysis was between structures and groups ($F = 2.15$; 8, 280 df; $p < .05$). Tests of simple effects at each group level were all significant (IMM: $F = 3.18$; 4, 280 df; $p < .05$; SUB: $F = 6.71$; 4, 280 df; $p < .01$; FC: $F = 7.72$; 4, 280 df; $p < .01$). Results of Newman-Keuls tests comparing the five means for each group can be seen in Table 3. In addition, tests of simple effects comparing two groups at a time indicated a significant difference between IMM and SUB ($F = 3.38$; 8, 280 df; $p < .01$), as well as between SUB and FC ($F = 2.66$; 8, 280 df; $p < .01$). However, no significant difference was found between IMM and FC ($F = .58$). This indicated that the pattern of avoidance of the five structures by SUB children was different from that of both IMM and FC children.

Strategies Used to Avoid the Use of Some Structures. Whenever avoidance of a certain structure occurred, the way a child got around using that structure was noted. The various strategies and their frequency of occurrence and percentages of use are described below for each structure (a summary of the strategies and the proportion of occurrence can be seen in Tables 4-8).

1) Indirect question: This structure was avoided to a large extent by all groups (see Table 4). Two strategies were used to avoid the indirect question. The first was to phrase the question directly--for example, il lui a demandé: qu'est ce que tu faisais? The second was to use a question marker other than

Table 3

Average Proportion of Avoidance of Five Structures by the Three Groups

	Auxil.	Ind.Ques.	Reflex	Subjunct.	Partic.
IMM	.20	.36	.39	.61	.66
	Ind.Ques.	Auxil	Reflex.	Subjunct.	Partic.
FC	.34	.34	.36	.50	.51
	Reflex.	Partic.	Auxil.	Ind.Ques.	Subjunct.
SUB	.10	.34	.39	.57	.84

Underlined means are not different from each other.

the qu'est ce que form which simply required the embedding of a declarative sentence. For example, by using the marker comment, children were able to produce a sentence of the form il lui a demandé comment il était. Children also produced sentences such as il lui a demandé s'il voulait être un petit garçon. This second strategy, which is used almost exclusively by FC children (15% in SUB and nil in IMM), seemed to be a more adult-like style than the first strategy, which is used mostly by IMM and SUB children.

2. Participle of Irregular Verbs Ending in re. Three strategies appeared in the avoidance of this structure (see Table 5 for proportion of occurrence). First, with the verb croire, a paraphrase was often used such that the children said ils ont dit: non, tu n'est pas un prince instead of using the verb croire in the participle as in ils n'ont pas cru qu'il était un prince. Second, the verb construire was replaced by another more commonly used verb. For example, instead of saying ils ont construit, the children would say ils ont fait. The third strategy used in avoiding the participle was to use the verb in a tense other than the passé composé or the plus-que-parfait, both of which require the participle. Thus, children might use the imparfait--as in il croyait.

3. Auxiliary être. Two strategies similar to the ones used for the participle emerged with this structure. The first way to avoid the use of the auxiliary in the passé composé or the plus-que-parfait was to put the verb in another tense. For example, when the imparfait was used, the children could say il allait and when the passé simple was used, children would say il alla, and thus avoid the use of être. A second way was to use another verb requiring the more common auxiliary avoir, such as by saying il a été au village. In general, the first strategy was more frequently used than the second (see Table 6).

Table 4

The Indirect Question: Proportion of Instances Where it was Avoided, Used Correctly or Used Incorrectly by the Six Groups

	AVOID[1]	AVOID[2]	CORRECT	INCORR.
IMM 3	.78(1.0)	0	0	.22
IMM 5	.40(1.0)	0	0	.60
SUB 3	.67(.85)	.11(.15)	0	.22
SUB 5	.44(1.0)	0	.11	.44
FC 3	.30(.43)	.40(.57)	0	.30
FC 5	.08(.33)	.17(.67)	.25	.50

Note: Proportion of specific avoidance strategy to other strategy is in parentheses.

Avoid 1: Use direct form: "ils ont dit: qu'est ce que tu faisais?"

Avoid 2: Il lui a demandé comment (s') il était. . . ."

Table 5

The Participle: Proportion of Instances Where it was Avoided, Used Correctly, or Used Incorrectly by the Six Groups

	AVOID[1]	AVOID[2]	AVOID[3]	CORRECT	INCORR.
IMM 3	.15(.40)	.11(.30)	.11(.30)	.42	.19
IMM 5	.08(.13)	.42(.67)	.12(.20)	.29	.08
SUB 3	.05(.13)	.26(.62)	.11(.25)	.47	.11
SUB 5	.08(.40)	.08(.40)	.04(.20)	.79	0
FC 3	.05(.20)	0	.30(.80)	.65	0
FC 5	.12(.29)	.06(.14)	.29(.57)	.53	0

Note: Proportion of specific avoidance strategy to other strategies is in parentheses.

Avoid 1: Paraphrase, as in: "Ils ont dit: non tu n'est pas un prince" instead of "ils n'ont pas cru. . . ."

Avoid 2: Replace verb, as in: "ils ont fait" instead of "ils ont construit."

Avoid 3: Use another tense, as in: "ils croyaient" instead of "ils ont cru. . . ."

Table 6

The Auxiliary: Proportion of Instances Where it was Avoided, Used Correctly, or Used Incorrectly by the Six Groups

	Avoid[1]	Avoid[2]	Correct	Incorrect
IMM 3	.25 (1.0)	0	.11	.63
IMM 5	.13 (.80)	.03 (.20)	.40	.43
SUB 3	.14 (.40)	.21 (.60)	.57	.07
SUB 5	.18 (1.0)	0	.82	0
FC 3	.32 (.64)	.18 (.36)	.41	.09
FC 5	.21 (.86)	.04 (.14)	.75	0

Proportion of specific avoidance strategy to other strategies is in parentheses.

Avoid[1]: Use another tense as in "il allait".

Avoid[2]: Use verb with auxiliary avoir: "il a été".

4. Reflexive. The verb se moquer was avoided by paraphrasing most frequently by IMM children (see Table 7). Thus, instead of saying ils se moquaient de lui children would say ils riaient quand il disait . . . The second reflexive verb included in the story, se changer, was also avoided by paraphrasing. With both of these, however, one cannot make generalizations about reflexives, since avoidance may have been due to unfamiliarity with the verb itself, and not due to uncertainty about the reflexive structure.

5. Subjunctive. This structure was avoided frequently by all groups (see Table 8). One way the subjunctive was avoided was through paraphrasing and the use of the infinitive form. For example, instead of using the subjunctive in

the sentence ils lui ont demandé qu'il fasse quelque chose, children would say ils lui ont demandé de faire quelque chose.

Table 7

Reflexive: Proportion of Instances Where it was Avoided, Used Correctly, or Used Incorrectly by the Six Groups

	Avoid[1]	Correct	Incorrect
IMM 3	.42	.16	.14
IMM 5	.41	.23	.36
SUB 3	.18	.61	.21
SUB 5	.19	.62	.19
FC 3	.39	.45	.16
FC 5	.36	.55	.09

Avoid[1]: Paraphrasing: "il riait" instead of "il se moquait".

Table 8

Subjunctive: Proportion of Instances Where it was Avoided, Used Correctly, or Used Incorrectly by the Six Groups

	Avoid[1]	Correct	Incorrect
IMM 3	.72	.14	.14
IMM 5	.85	.05	.10
SUB 3	1.0	0	0
SUB 5	.87	.06	.06
FC 3	.91	.09	0
FC 5	.63	.37	0

Avoid[1]: Verb in the infinitive: "ils lui ont demandé de faire quelque chose".

In summary, common strategies of avoidance could be identified for the five structures under study. The extent to which avoidance occurred differed according to structure, grade level and group. In grade three, the indirect question was avoided most frequently, whereas in grade five, the subjunctive and the participle were avoided most frequently. Moreover, regardless of grade level, children in the SUB group avoided structures significantly more often than children in the FC and IMM groups. FC and IMM children did not differ from each other in the extent to which they avoided structures, although it should be noted that, in general, FC children produced significantly more correct structures than IMM children. It would seem, then, that avoidance could be useful to the language learner as a strategy of communication when a certain level of competence has already been achieved. Thus, the child in SUB, who is in general more fluent than the IMM child, may be able to avoid structures that he is not comfortable with more adequately than the IMM child and, consequently, is able to communicate more effectively. In conclusion, examining the use of communication strategies by language learners throws light on an important dimension of the language learning process.

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